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SUBJECT: OCTOBER LOCAL ELECTIONS: A QUICK LOOK AT KEY  
RACES

REF: BOGOTA 5431

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer - Reasons 4.1 (b, d)

#### Quick Look at Key Races

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[1](#)1. (U) October elections will determine 32 governors, 1,099 mayors, and thousands of state assembly and city council members across Colombia. Control of those seats is crucial to strengthening grass roots party infrastructure heading into the 2010 presidential elections, so parties take every race seriously. The largest parties (Liberals, Conservatives, Polo Democratico, the U Party, and Cambio Radical) will field candidates across the country, though coalition building and back room deals will be key. National elections officials, political parties, and the international community are taking numerous steps to prevent the interference of illegal armed groups in the elections (reftel).

[1](#)2. (C) Opposition Liberal Party leader and former President Cesar Gaviria told us the importance of local issues and party alliances across the opposition/government divide means the October results will say little about the popularity of President Uribe or his policies. By law, the president is proscribed from campaigning in the elections or endorsing candidates. Presidency Secretary and Uribe political operator Bernardo Moreno said Uribista candidates will do well, but said the elections will reveal the weakness, or "atomization," of the parties in the governing coalition.

#### Bogota Mayor

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[1](#)3. (C) In the Bogota mayor race, widely considered the second-most important elected position in Colombia after president, former Bogota mayor Enrique Penalosa (independent) faces former-Senator Samuel Moreno (Polo Democratico Party). Moreno won a Polo primary on July 7 against former foreign minister Maria Emma Mejia. Most observers predict Penalosa, who already has support from a coalition of Liberals and Cambio Radical, will win an easy victory. Still, a July 15 poll released by Bogota daily El Tiempo showed the two in a statistical tie, and Bernardo Moreno told us Samuel could pull an upset. Current Mayor Eduardo "Lucho" Garzon's support will be crucial. Though a Polo member, it is not certain the centrist Garzon will actively support Moreno who

is perceived as further to the left.

¶4. (C) Penalosa told us a Polo victory would ease the way for a Polo candidate to make an expected second round in the 2010 presidential elections. Garzon political advisor Juan Ospina told us a Polo loss would exacerbate tensions between the moderate Garzon and more radical elements, possibly leading the party to break apart. Penalosa said his support in middle and upper income groups--who have higher turnout and are opinion leaders--means the close poll numbers are misleading. He claims a substantial lead among likely voters. Still, many likely Penalosa voters are highly critical of him for getting his campaign off to a slow start.

Medellin, Cali, Barranquilla:

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¶5. (C) In Medellin, former Medellin mayor Luis Perez (independent) leads in early polling for mayor and former-Senator Luis Alfredo Ramos (Alas Equipo) is the favorite for governor of Antioquia. In Cali, three-time mayoral race loser Francisco "Kiko" Lloreda (Conservative, but running as an independent), whose family controls leading Cali daily El Espectador, leads the mayor's race. Current Valle de Cauca Governor Angelino Garzon told us he is concerned that Juan Carlos Abadia (Convergencia Ciudadana), from a family of well-known narcos, may be able to buy his way into the Valle governor's office in a tight race with six other candidates. In Barranquilla, construction magnate Alejandro Char (Cambio Radical), son of former Senator and Olympica supermarket owner Fuad Char, dominates polls in the mayoral race. Jose Name (U Party), a thirty year veteran of the Senate, is in a tight race for Atlantico governor with former environment minister Eduardo Verano (Liberal Party).

Drucker